

Teacher Education in the Post-Modern Era: Introducing a Transformative Dimension in the Teaching of English as a Lingua Franca

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Abstract: The paper introduces an innovative framework for ELF (English as a Lingua Franca) teacher education. It responds to the emerging need for appropriately informing and sensitizing ESOL practitioners about ELF matters. It supports that ELF teacher education can gain enormously by implementing the rigorous, reflection-based transformative methodology of adult education theorist Jack Mezirow. I put forward a five-stage framework that integrates adult education and ESOL teacher education methods and prompts interested ELF teachers to transcribe and reflect on authentic ELF discourse, study the relevant ELF and world English literature, problematize the consequences of ELF pedagogy and work out a plan of action that would be appropriate for their own teaching context.

Key words: English as a lingua franca, teacher education, transformative learning

1. Introduction

It is common knowledge today that the global spread of English has greatly impacted ESOL research. Among the themes that have been researched by various scholars in recent years along these lines it is possible to find new insights in the unprecedented use of English by non-native users internationally (Crystal, 2003; Graddol, 2006). What is more, the sociolinguistics of English as an international or world language is now a firmly established discipline (Melchers & Shaw, 2003). These concerns have raised implications regarding the ways in which the language is perceived, that range from issues concerning the role and importance of 'native' and 'non-native' speakers (Leung *et al* 1997; Davies, 2002), the ownership of the language by its users (Widdowson, 1994) or the processes involved in the negotiation and projection of their identity (Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004). Of particular importance is research on the attitudes and beliefs of learners and teachers around the world regarding different aspects of this phenomenon (e.g. Sifakis & Sougari, 2005; Timmis, 2002, Jenkins, 2006a).

While there are still many issues to be resolved (cf., for example, recent debating on the proper terming of the different facets of non-native speaker English in Seidlhofer, 2004: 210ff.), a lot of research in the past few years is providing increasing evidence of lingua franca discourse (Mauranen, 2003) that gives important insights on ELF lexicogrammar (Seidlhofer, 2001, 2004), pronunciation (Jenkins, 2000) and pragmatics (House, 1999). There are also substantial contributions on teaching (McKay, 2002; Pennycook, 1999) and language teaching policy (e.g., Canagarajah, 2005; Phillipson, 2003).

One of the areas that still remains largely unexplored is the professional preparation or, better, the education of teachers who would be interested in teaching English as a Lingua Franca (ELF), i.e. English intended for communication mainly between non-native users (Jenkins, 2006a: 169; Sifakis, 2004). There is currently little discussion on that matter (see, for example, Seidlhofer, 1999, Snow *et al.*, 2006, Sifakis, 2007), as the bulk of research seems to be on delineating the ELF domain. Nevertheless, that research already raises concerns that could challenge many established beliefs and

preconceptions of ESOL practitioners. There is an eminent need for a general framework for ELF teacher education that would inform and sensitize ESOL practitioners about ELF matters. What is more, there is evidence to suggest the existence of a mismatch between what ESOL teachers seem to believe about the English that they teach to their non-native learners and the competences and abilities that they believe these learners need when communicating with other non-native users (Sifakis & Sougari, 2005). In essence, when it comes to actual teaching concerns, most ESOL practitioners around the world seem to share the more traditional, established beliefs regarding the importance of a single variety (usually British English or General American) for their teaching situation.

With these concerns in mind, this paper responds to the need for a comprehensive framework for ELF teacher education. In what follows, I first briefly delineate the ELF situation and then discuss the transformative model for adult learning put forward by the American theorist and pedagogue Jack Mezirow. I then go on to put forward a preliminary model of ELF teacher education based on that model.

2. The ELF domain: a brief orientation

ELF refers to the predominantly oral English communication exercised among the so-called 'non-native' users of the language. Such communication raises issues that can be broadly distinguished into two categories. The first category (let us call it "primary") concerns the linguistic and communication concerns that bear upon the ELF discourse itself. This covers elements of the ELF lexicogrammar such as the non-use of the third person singular marker, the all-purpose use of question tags, the heavy reliance on verbs of high semantic generality, etc. (for more extensive lists, see Seidlhofer, 2004: 220 and Jenkins, 2006a: 170). It also includes generalizations about the pragmatics of ELF regarding, for example, the importance of intelligible discourse and the scarcity of misunderstandings and L1 interference, the use of communication strategies such as rephrasing and repetition, and the overall mutually supportive cooperation among interlocutors (Seidlhofer, 2004: 218).

The second category (let us call it "secondary") refers to issues concerning ELF users' awareness of communication-oriented as well as attitudinal, cultural, policy-related, history-related and pedagogical concerns. Such concerns refer, for example, to the hegemonic role of the native speaker of English, the notion of Standard English vis-à-vis the different 'types' of English found around the world, the 'legitimacy of variation in different communities of use' (Seidlhofer, 2004: 214), the negotiation of language users' identities. It further extends to related issues such as the imperialistic characteristics of ESOL policies and pedagogies (Phillipson, 1992; Pennycook, 1998), the multiplicity of TESOL situations around the world, (English for testing, English for specific purposes, English for young learners, etc.), implications for teaching methodology, literacy (McKay, 2002: 125ff) and testing (Jenkins, 2006b).

3. The transformative model for adult learning: an introduction

Jack Mezirow's transformative model for adult learning is grounded in the reflective teaching tradition and also merges insights from the action research tradition. It essentially aims at bringing participants to confront and change their established viewpoints about a particular issue by providing hands-on information and asking them to (a) realize and critically examine their assumptions, (b) openly explore new terrains by trying new roles, (c) plan a course of action, (d) acquire knowledge and skills for implementing that plan, (d) build self-confidence in the new roles and (e) become reintegrated on the basis of conditions dictated by the new perspective.

Methodologically, the transformative model builds on and expands Freire's emancipatory model of 'social transformation' (Freire, 1970) and Boyd's analytical 'transformative education' perspective (Boyd, 1991) and has been implemented in many diverse domains that involve adult learning, that vary from peacemaking to AIDS education, and from social justice to spiritual education (see case studies in Mezirow & Associates, 2000). It has also been extensively adopted in many programs in adult ESOL literacy and numeracy (e.g., Comings et al, 2004) and cultural awareness (e.g., Silver et al, 2003), and to some extent in ESOL teacher education (e.g., Pickering, 2003; Crosby, 2004).

The great advantage of integrating such a model in ESOL (and ELF) teacher education is that its implementation can prompt teachers to realize, review and change the uncritically assimilated beliefs, judgments and feelings that we may have about key issues in our pedagogy (Johnson, 2006). This is the aim of autonomous and reflective teaching that is grounded in Dewey's (1933: 9) definition of reflection as the "active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusions to which it tends". Reflection does not simply consist of a series of steps or processes that teachers should use but "is a holistic way of meeting and responding to problems, a way of being as a teacher [...] that involves more than logical and rational problem-solving processes [...] intuition, emotion, and passion" (Zeichner & Liston 1996: 9).

4. Mezirow's 'transformative learning'

The model was first introduced by Jack Mezirow in 1978 and has since evolved "into a comprehensive and complex description of how learners construe, validate, and reformulate the meaning of their experience" (Cranton, 1994: 22). It essentially breaks down the adult mind into sets of habits and expectations that have been formed as a result of experience over time.

These habits and expectations are of two types. On the one hand, they are what Mezirow calls *meaning schemes*, which are "made up of specific knowledge, beliefs, value judgments, and feelings that constitute interpretations of experience" (Mezirow, 1991: 5-6). Meaning schemes are tangible determinants of particular views or behaviors that inform our evaluation of and reaction to all kinds of different life events. They are tangible in the sense that they are "known" to us and can therefore be consciously monitored by us, and are easy to change in the sense that an individual can add to or integrate experiences and ideas within an existing scheme. On the other hand, they are what Mezirow calls *meaning perspectives* or *frames of reference*, which refer to higher-order sets of habitual expectation that are created by ideologies and learning styles and constitute codes that govern the activities of perceiving, comprehending, and remembering. These frames provide us with criteria for judging or evaluating right and wrong, bad and good, beautiful and ugly, true and false, appropriate and inappropriate.

Transformative learning occurs when the meaning perspectives are put under scrutiny. The whole process is quite demanding and can be time consuming. Interestingly, our immediate beliefs and expectations (meaning schemes) can continue to change while our overall worldview (frame of reference) remains unaltered. To return to ESOL, teachers can easily recognize the need for intelligibility in the communication between non-native speakers of English, but may refuse to change their established teaching practices with their own learners (Sifakis & Sougari, 2005). Teachers' worldview about ESOL pedagogy may be shaped by many factors, e.g. their previous learning and teaching experience, learners' needs, sponsors' interests, local culture, and inherent beliefs about their role as custodians of Standard English (Widdowson, 2002).

When meaning schemes and meaning perspectives are found to be inadequate in accommodating some life experience, the transformative process can be used as a means of prompting the emergence of new schemes and new perspectives that would be “more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective” (Mezirow, 2000: 7). In order for the new schemes and perspectives to emerge, it is necessary for adults to engage in critical reflection regarding their values, beliefs, and assumptions.

In order for transformative learning to occur, adults should engage in “greater autonomy in thinking” (Mezirow, 2000: 29). This cannot be achieved by simply making them aware of a particular problem or by prompting them to experience it. It is necessary to also involve them in critically reflecting on that experience and critiquing their established ways of defining a problem (Mezirow, 1998: 186).

Mezirow (1991: 107-8) distinguished between three types of reflection on experience. The first, *content reflection*, focuses on the actual experience itself, i.e. our very perceptions, thoughts, feelings and actions that bring to life that experience. For example, deciding that Standard English is the ideal model for our learners is the outcome of a series of mental processes (what Mezirow calls a ‘thoughtful action’, p. 107) that are based on personal experience or prior learning. The second type, *process reflection*, addresses the ways in which an experience is worked upon in our mind and involves examining our perceptions, thoughts, feelings and actions and assessing their efficacy. For example, we might reconsider the circumstances that led to our forming the impression that ‘Standard English is the ideal model’. Finally, *premise reflection* involves careful reviewing of the foundations of our perceptions, thoughts, feelings and actions by referring, when necessary, to long-held, socially constructed assumptions, beliefs, and values about a particular experience or problem. It means seriously questioning whether ‘standard’ and ‘ideal model’ are adequate, appropriate or fair concepts for understanding communication in English among NNSs.

According to Mezirow, it is only by engaging in the latter type of reflection that adult learners foster transformative learning. In order for this to happen, participants in adult education programmes respond to a variety of tasks that prompt them to bring their assumptions concerning that experience or problem to the fore and then critically reflect on and assess those assumptions. The whole process is triggered by participants experiencing an initial problem or “disorienting dilemma” that makes them aware of certain thoughts and feelings they may have concerning a particular experience or problem. At this stage, the learner engages in self-examination that is often accompanied by “feelings of fear, anger, guilt or shame” (Mezirow, 2000: 22). In the next stages, learners are asked to critically examine these reactions, share their feelings with the rest of the group, explore possibilities for adopting new roles, relationships, and actions and plan a course of action that would help them build up competence and self-confidence in their new roles and relationships. The final stage of the transformative process calls for a reintegration of the new perspective into the participants’ life and practice. It is essential that participants act upon that new perspective and do not merely critically reflect on these new ideas (Taylor, 1998). If the process is successfully fulfilled, transformative learning leads to the participant’s autonomy, self-learning and, ultimately, empowerment.

5. Integrating transformative learning in ELF teacher education: a preliminary framework

The opportunities and challenges that the transformative model outlined above presents to ELF teacher education are enormous. The greatest advantage of such a model is that

it identifies effective learning not merely with using reflective practice and action research in order to improve one's efficiency in teaching, but with engaging with it in a way that will change one's perspectives about its subject-matter (in our case, understanding and preparing for teaching ELF).

It should be stressed, however, that the success of such a project would almost wholly depend on its implementation. For this reason, it is imperative that participant selection in these programs is carefully organized. Prospective ELF teachers should be willing to find out more about ELF and World English and be open to change. Good participant selection will also ensure group cohesion.

The transformative learning framework laid out here does not necessarily require ESOL teachers to completely and immediately change their worldview about English and their professional role in their familiar teaching context. What it offers is an opportunity for teachers to become actively aware of the complicated issues that ELF research raises and their implications for communication and pedagogy. Throughout all phases of this process, participants are prompted to critically analyse and reflect, and to become skilful participants in open and uncensored communication, dialogue, deep listening and networking with their colleagues. In the rest of the paper I present the different stages of such a framework in some detail.

A. Preparation stage

At the outset of the actual session, it is important for the educator to form a comprehensive idea not only of individual participants but of how coherent participant groups can be formed. For this reason, participants are asked to respond to some questions concerning their own professional background, studies and interests. They are also asked to briefly sketch how they use English, which skills are usually involved (e.g. some may use it to send emails, others to chat with their friends on the phone), who they use it with (native or non-native users) and for what reason (e.g. to attend conferences or just to teach English). The questions, which can be answered following Golombek's (1998) narrative orientation, can also touch upon issues that will be raised in the seminar. Participants can be asked to engage in content reflection by, e.g., giving their definition of the notion of 'error' in the use of English, saying whether they are at all conscious of such errors when they use English and what kind of errors those are (e.g. communication-oriented errors target comprehensibility while language-oriented errors target grammar, use of lexis, pronunciation, etc). As the group sessions unfold, these responses will provide the raw material for further discussions and explorations of the issues raised in the training sessions.

B. Identification stage

This stage begins with the participants getting to know one another (by using typical ice-breaking techniques) and engaging in content reflection, i.e. slowly becoming aware of both (a) what is involved in ELF communication and (b) their own interpretations of and reactions toward it. This is an important, yet subtle, phase because it aims at involving participants in the discovery of ELF, sensitizing them about the primary issues involved and preparing them for the more extensive, secondary issues that it raises (see section 2 above). For this reason, the methodology adopted here should carefully consider participants' backgrounds and needs, the local ESOL tradition, etc.

A significant part of this phase concerns the exposition of participants to extensive excerpts of authentic spoken ELF discourse. The idea here is to integrate elements of the international character of English usage, which involves examples of as many forms of communication involving non-native speakers as possible. Depending on the case,

samples of communication involving native speakers can also be integrated as it can shed light on interesting communication-oriented differences (Chun et al, 1982). Spoken discourse is usually in audio form only, but it will significantly help if it is in audiovisual form, where participants can also see the interlocutors. If the trainer has access to different types of discourse, it is useful to select as varied examples as possible, incorporating standard and non-standard dialects alike. If possible, trainers can also integrate material from published ELF corpora. Alternatively, if such material is unavailable or inaccessible, the trainer can use the participants themselves as providers of ELF data.

The collected material is distributed to groups of participants, who must listen to or view different sections of it and transcribe them. While transcribing, participants are asked to write down their thoughts and reactions concerning the ELF discourse (this of course will work better if the participants are of different nationalities). Their transcriptions and notes are gathered and discussed in groups. Transcription is important here, as it will give participants the time necessary to carefully consider fragments of ELF discourse and start reflecting on it.

It is important that participants take time to consider each discourse excerpt separately and discuss not only its linguistics-specific characteristics (e.g. use of grammar and lexis) but also its communication-specific parameters (e.g. who is involved, what the topic is, etc.). Questions to be set at this stage may refer to their initial reaction to such communication, which would very likely raise concerns about participants' sense of comprehensibility and norm-boundness (Sifakis, 2004). They may also focus on problems deriving from the transcribing process, the strengths and weaknesses of the communication (e.g., interlocutors' language competence levels and accommodation capabilities, etc.), the extent to which participants feel such discourse deviates from a certain norm or their viewpoints about the frequency of such discourse around the world.

In essence, the aim of this phase is for participants to realize how ELF works by carrying out a form of discourse analysis of the transcribed excerpts. In doing so, it is expected that they will initially have a lot more to say about the linguistics-specific characteristics of a discourse excerpt and should be left to exhaust their views on those issues. They should then be prompted to look deeper into the pragmatics of each excerpt. They can be asked to describe the communication situation as fully and comprehensively as possible, by referring to who is involved, what the topic of the conversation is, and participants' communication strategies. Finally, participants will focus on noting down their own reactions, attitudes or judgments regarding all the above characteristics of each discourse excerpt. For example, they may have strong preferences for certain native-speaker accents and be judgmental of possible grammar, vocabulary and pragmatic errors made by non-native speakers and even native speakers with non-standard accents/dialects.

The transformative aim of these steps is to make participants aware of their own meaning schemes, i.e. their implicit views regarding the primary issues involved in ELF teaching. This process involves content reflection, in that it invokes participants' thoughts, feelings and actions that are related to reacting to ELF discourse.

C. Awareness stage

Participants are now asked to read selected articles or chapters on ELF that problematize the primary elements involved and debate the ELF case for the secondary elements (cf. section 2 above). They therefore gain a more comprehensive understanding of the ELF issues that are immediately and easily discernible and refer to

linguistic and communication concerns, while being slowly and progressively introduced to those that require deeper and more localized reflection. Readings that can be integrated can refer, for example, to the history of English as a global language, Jenkins' lingua franca core (Jenkins 2000), the World Standard English orientation (e.g. Crystal, 2003) and research on native speakers (Brutt-Griffler & Samimi, 2001) with material from post-colonial studies and critical discussions regarding policy issues (e.g. Canagarajah, 2005).

At this stage, it is paramount that group dialogue deepens and should refer to contexts with which participants are most familiar. Thus, participants from Europe can reflect on the policies supporting societal multilingualism and individual plurilingualism put forward by the European Union and the Council of Europe in the light of the elevated role of lingua franca English (Seidlhofer, 2004: 221; Phillipson, 2003). Another strategy would be to allocate the key readings to different participant groups and ask them to present them to the entire class. Even though not every possible issue involved in the ELF debate will be covered, it is important that participants become immersed in the complexity and inter-relatedness of those issues that interest them – it is the only way they will make sense of them and perhaps reach some tangible realizations.

This phase is very likely to result in making participants realize, probably for the first time in their professional lives, the true dimensions of the matter at hand (this would correspond to Mezirow's 'disorienting dilemma' stage). They might, for example, feel that they themselves have overemphasized the importance of native speakers of English. On the other hand, they might choose not to "take sides" on the matter at that particular moment. What is important is that they will have seriously reflected on the key issues of the ELF debate by relating them to their own very personal and familiar way of perceiving English. The educator's role is to facilitate participants' reflection and not try to influence or force their decisions.

D. Transformation stage

With the development of the various stages, the issues discussed will start to become more and more centralized around participants' individual teaching situations and influences and choices that have formed their professional identity. Following the narrative orientation, participants should be prompted to extensively reflect on the elements that have helped them form their professional identity. Questions posed at this stage can refer to the professional influences of participants, the rewards and difficulties of the teaching profession, the element of professional autonomy that they experience, future aspirations, types of teaching situations encountered, teaching methods employed, etc.

At this stage, participants are expected to become fully aware of their own meaning perspectives about English and ESOL pedagogy and engage in process and premise reflection. This can be achieved by asking them to reflect on video/audio recordings of their classes (if available), teaching processes, curricular situation, textbooks used, learner assessment and testing, and learners' needs. It is important for them to understand why they teach what they teach and why they teach it the way they do. Also, their roles and expected professional behaviors inside and outside the classroom should be discussed. This may involve, for example, what/how their learners, employers and learners' sponsors expect them to teach and assess, or how important their role as guardians of Standard English is for them, their learners and the local society. These issues are likely to raise further discussion on the ethics of an ELF pedagogy for

participants' specific teaching contexts, i.e. whether it is ethical, and to what extent it is safe, for them to change their meaning perspectives about English and ESOL teaching.

E. Planning stage

The final phase of this transformative framework has participants design, implement and evaluate an ELF action plan. In order to achieve that, it is crucial that participants are fully aware of all the major issues involved in ELF discourse and pedagogy and have grasped the implications for their own teaching context. It is expected that this planning stage integrates instruments from current ESOL research with the difference that the basis for action would be the ELF principles as participants understand them. In this way, participant teachers are reintegrated into their own practice and are prompted to implement the new ELF perspective where necessary. Teachers should have a full understanding of what is involved in ELF, as they may have to use many of the transformative techniques that they themselves have experienced with their own learners.

6. Conclusion

I have put forward, in this paper, a five-stage framework for ELF teacher education based on Mezirow's transformative adult learning paradigm. The framework aims at enabling ESOL practitioners to become fully aware of the characteristics and challenges that ELF discourse and teaching engender and, essentially, open up to change by realizing and transforming their worldviews and perspectives about ESOL teaching. A basic assumption of such an approach is that mere description of the established theories and analyses of the ELF case is not enough, as it may oversimplify the issues and lead to reinforcing existing stereotypes. It is important for teachers in different parts of the world to become immersed in ELF, become fully aware of its primary and secondary features, and actively reflect on the issues that emerge by relating them to their own experiences, beliefs and teaching contexts.

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